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To the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services;

On behalf of the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition), I would like to thank Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS) for the opportunity to input into the development of the ACT Carers Charter (the Charter).

### **About the Youth Coalition of the ACT**

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 100 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on youth issues, along with providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions for young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition has reviewed the draft Charter Discussion Paper, and commends DHCS for its efforts to support carers in our community.

### **Young Carers in the ACT**

In 2002, it was estimated that around 10% of the population of young people in the ACT were young carers<sup>1</sup>. However, recent research suggests that this figure is underestimated, as young people caring for family members affected by alcohol and other drug (AOD) use are often excluded from the definition of young carers<sup>2</sup>.

### **The Needs of Young Carers**

In 2005 the Youth Coalition conducted research with young carers in the ACT. Young

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<sup>1</sup> Gays, M (2002) A Lifetime of Caring: ACT Schools-based Young Carers Survey; Marymead Child and Family Centre, Canberra

<sup>2</sup> Noble-Carr, D; Moore, T; McArthur, M (2009) Who Cares? Experiences of Young People Living with a Family Member who has a Alcohol or Other Drug Issue, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Canberra

carers called for more support for their relatives and families including: More personal support, respite, in-home care, assistance with employment, family-based rehabilitation, family counseling and mediation, advocacy and financial support.

Young carers also called for more support for themselves including: help with education, community awareness, recognition and respect, training of professionals, information on their relative's condition, information on available services, respite and personal support<sup>3</sup>.

### **Towards an ACT Carers Charter**

The Youth Coalition supports the draft Charter expanding the definition of a carer to describe '*a person who provides unpaid primary care to someone else who is dependent on the person for ongoing care and assistance*'. We believe that this definition could assist young people in the ACT to identify as young carers.

Young carers may not self identify with service providers as needing support for many reasons. These may include feelings of shame regarding their family circumstances, previous poor perception of support offered, and feelings of guilt or pride about their own ability to provide support to family members.

The Youth Coalition also supports the draft Charter's recognition of kinship carers and foster carers, who offer valuable support in our community.

We broadly support the seven key principles in the draft Charter:

- 1. Carers have the right to decide whether to take on or continue the role of Carer and are supported in their choices;*
- 2. The health and wellbeing of Carers is supported through services and programs;*
- 3. Resources are available to provide timely and adequate assistance to Carers;*
- 4. Affordable services of a high standard are available to people who need care, complementing the role of the Carer;*
- 5. The critical contribution of Carers is recognised, valued and promoted in the community;*
- 6. The Carer and the person receiving care are regarded as a partnership, in which each person has rights and responsibilities;*
- 7. Organisations welcome and support Carer participation at all levels of decision-making, with respect for the rights and choices of people receiving care.*

However, the Youth Coalition would like further information as to the practical application of Principles 1 and 7 of the draft Charter, and the implications this may have for government and non-government agencies in providing support.

The Youth Coalition also supports the draft Charter's recognition of kinship carers and foster carers. In response to the discussion question '*Are other mechanisms necessary to support caring relationships that may not be identified by the Caring for*

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<sup>3</sup> Moore, T (2005) More than Words: Supporting Young Carers and Their Families, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra

*Carers Policy or Foster Carers and Kinship Carers Guide?* we believe increased support for the often complex relationship between foster/kinship carers, statutory bodies and the community sector is needed. This support can include increasing awareness of resources available, and greater collaborative case management.

The Youth Coalition also highlights the unique needs of young carers. Issues such as school attendance, income support payments, and peer socialisation all require a youth specific approach, that takes into account the views and expressed needs of young people, as well as the appropriate developmental stages of young people.

The Youth Coalition would be keen to review the submissions and community input received through the consultations on the draft Charter, and in particular, the methods used for youth engagement and participation.

## **Conclusion**

The Youth Coalition broadly supports the draft Charter. We believe that more work will need to be done to educate the community as to the nature and depth of the issue of young carers in the ACT, and that the Charter may assist with this process. We strongly support the ACT Government providing information to people providing care and support to identify themselves as carers.

We recommend that further information be provided regarding how the Charter will be implemented across ACT government agencies, and what provision for review and evaluation will exist in the future.

The Youth Coalition would welcome the opportunity to work with the ACT Government to support the youth sector to have input into the further development of the Charter.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 6247 3540 or at [director@youthcoalition.net](mailto:director@youthcoalition.net) if you wish to discuss this letter further.

Sincerely,



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